George Washington's Farm Reports, 1789-1798

Transcribing George Washington's Farm Reports:

Between 1786 and his death in 1799, George Washington had the farm managers he entrusted with the supervision of his five farms at Mount Vernon send him weekly reports. About 235 of these reports (including a group from 1785 that Washington wrote himself) survive. While a few of the farm reports appear in the modern <u>published edition</u> of Washington's papers, most are unpublished (although the letters that accompanied them are). Approximately fifty farm reports, both whole and fragmentary, are part of the <u>George Washington Papers</u> at the Library of Congress; the rest are at other libraries, including the Washington Library at Mount Vernon.

In 2021 Joseph Mitchell, an intern with the Library's Archives, History and Heritage Advanced Internship Program, identified the unpublished farm reports in the George Washington Papers at the Library and prepared them for crowdsourcing by the Library's "By the People" project.

Volunteer transcribers for "By the People" will make these farm reports easily readable and searchable for the first time.

Washington's farm reports are an important source of information about the agriculture and industries at Mount Vernon, and his implementation of new, chiefly British, ideas about farming. However, it was the people enslaved at Mount Vernon who carried out most of this work. The reports are, perhaps most significantly, a rare record of their lives and labor.

Understanding George Washington's Farm Reports:

Most of the farm reports in the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress date from the period when Washington was president of the United States (1789-1797) and living most of the time in New York and Philadelphia. The managers who reported to him during these years were: his nephew George Augustine Washington, 1786-1790; Anthony Whiting, or Whitting, 1790-1793; another nephew, Howell Lewis, 1793-1794; William Pearce, 1794-1796; and James Anderson, 1796-1802.

Before 1786, when Washington instituted a systematic method of reporting, his farms were managed for him by his cousin, Lund Washington. Lund worked for Washington for more than twenty years, a period that included the Revolutionary War. His reports to Washington took the form of letters. These are in his papers, and they were published along with the rest of Washington's correspondence. By 1786, when George Augustine Washington arrived to take over from Lund, George Washington had devised a structure for the farm reports that all subsequent farm managers would use (and which was part of the reason why they weren't published: in the era before digital databases, the editors of the Papers of George Washington at the University of Virginia found their tabular structure challenging.)

According to the structure dictated by George Washington, each report begins with a daily weather record. Following the weather record is an accounting of labor at each of the farms: Mansion House, Dogue Run, River Farm, Muddy Hole, and Ferry and French's ("French's" was named after his neighbor Penelope French, who rented him the land and the slaves who lived there. Washington combined French's Farm with Ferry Farm and in 1793 named the combined land Union Farm).

1	meteorological account	of the histor	hopet at his	int formen.	
T. Just	menny Mi Gar	Nom liste	Gas Ny	HIS Clar	
21-	. Sst Clear	Nom SSW	Clear 114	ALSSW Clear	
0.2.	SW Clean	Noon Sty		At SSE Baine	
4	JSE Closed	Noon SSE	Cloudy Ny	11.880 CG	/
3,4	SSE Maine	New CSG	Elmedy No	ht SSW Chair	an the
20	DS Togger	. Neca Me	Clear Ni	At NE Clear	
7	Cann	7			
		,		The second	
-	11.	mil. 7. 1702	ox ox	10 00 00 s	10
6/3					
	anston Stouse is	the Worked 12 %	con 6 top 24	Gil duffplich	4 /32
C.3	anston Stoust p.	the Work of 12 9.	en le troje + 4 Ve hay e day	Gil the place	4 /32
C.15	ansion Flower por	the Work of 12 2. Toch o Copen Sof on the poch Do	en le trop + 4 Ve tray e day in princedores	Geil the poster for	3
.65	d "hauling rails for Carlo hauling dung	om the posts lives from Forey barn to	in formedorez. The pres bans	ho in Benchidu	dwll
.15.	d Nauling rails for Carto Kauling Lung Transing from & saw	en Harpsah War Jem Ferry barn di Es No Gersmaion	in formale reg. The poor ban Loruser's Sher	he an Banchiden to pom metere de	ww. 11
. 15. . 16.	d hauling rails for Carto hauling dung Thauling food & said hauling Compone fo	en the peach Wes from Ferry barn do to the Granners i ing & Carrying ther	in formedo regi Ma poes bars Corner o Sher quito Ma Pahir	au Ma particular har an Paris Salain ha Paris Indese da y Sanding e day	ww. 11
.6.	d harling rails for Carlo Rauling dung Rauling Josef & sain harding Cornfrom Po Coins do Mose " 1	en Marpach Woo Jem Forn barn de la de Desameers ing & Carrying Mar Jambiery Smith	on formed reg Ma pose bases Lorenze is Shoo ye to Marfelio En C. o Nas	an Mapastanfo har on Premobilism to From Indese da gestandings day	- 2
.15. .16. .15.	of handing rails for Carte Handing doing Transing from to saw handing Compone to Coing to Alas &	from Fory barn de from Fory barn de he de Germany Mar ing & Canyong Mar francing Simili- rung & Oli Foram	en formade region than poor barre. Corner of Shor yeste Markelin Carl o day h in ourse of Ma	he on Been hidered to From Indere do yelandery o day	2 day 12
	of handing daily for Carthe handing during handing for for form for handing Compounts Coing to bloom for Old fack manned you Mouring carned June	pembery bean he from tony bean he to do Inscriber in ing & Carrying there in a from the France want to the France was to the France	Ma pour barre Parmer o Shar Could the ficher Could be day to in carring the	he on Brown hiden to Brown miles do get and ingest day who is desproy hope to	2 day 12 b
18. 18. 18. 18.	of handing rate to Carte Kanding down of handing Complete on to Round to the to Both down to Old Jack mount of you Polovier case of Jones Juneov degging brook	pombery ban he be to many to Carrying the many to the France of the France of the France of the Sant to	in pounds reper barne. Comment Short Comment Short Come of Harpetor Since of Aray Sincorrege Short Comming Short Comming Short	has an Brown his how to from Indere do y Landing to day hope of the form of th	2 day 12 day 12
18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18.	of handing tails to Carle handing though the way to handing from the confirmation of the Court o	pendery ban he be to the mannier of the mannier that the manny that the many to the Team to the	in pounds report barners Show and the fisher of the stay	he on Benchisher to the Rome Indian to the standard of any look to day he will be to the standard of the stand	2 day 12 lday
18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18.	of the traveling the for Carle Pauling drawn Traveling from to a sur- handing from to a for Coing to Mount to Coing to Mount to Polor on carried from Theorem carried from Theorem carried from Traveling the parts to repairing the forth	from Form bear of the Marine of the Survey of Cangrage Most from the many of the Survey of the Surve	in pounds of the poer barre. For the poer barre of the poer be the poer be in consing the a for the belong the a for the belong the a for the belong the af the the belong to the the belong to of the the belong to the the belong the af the the belong to the belong the af the the belong the after the belong t	we the particular the army have the permission of any of a	2 day 12
18 18 18 18 18 18 18 18 18 18 18 18 18 1	of Hanling outs if the Court hanling during from the owner than the Court from the Court for the Hanling the Court for the Court	from the park live from the park live for the framework to the framework t	in principle of the price bearing of the fisher of the fisher of the property of the invariant of the the fire the	he an Parchiston he an Parchiston to Them Indias do yelandings day oh i duplinghaper (his duplinghaper (his duplinghaper (his duplinghaper (in the history of day (in the history of day (in the history of day (in the history of day	2 day 12
18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18. 18.	of the traveling the for Carle Pauling drawn Traveling from to a sur- handing from to a for Coing to Mount to Coing to Mount to Polor on carried from Theorem carried from Theorem carried from Traveling the parts to repairing the forth	from Form being being to the formand the same of the formand the same of the s	in princede of the poor have been and the falor. I have been a stage of the stage of the ledge of the ledge of the ledge. The ledge of the ledge.	and the pooling for the and the form interes of a grandings of any language from the angle of th	2 day 12

This is an example of one of the reports, from the week of April 7, 1792. https://www.loc.gov/item/mgw437456/

The reports include counts of livestock, tables reporting the output of the grist mill, and lists and tables showing the work of brickmakers, joiners (cabinetmakers) and carpenters, coopers (barrel makers), ditchers, gardeners, and spinners and knitters. Some of these lists and tables are separate from the reports, and may be fragments of reports that no longer exist.

Each report includes lists, by farm, of enslaved workers who lost time at work due to sickness. Childbirths are listed here. Some reports mention journeys people took off the farms, to nearby Alexandria and elsewhere. Washington's enslaved workers, men, women, and children, are listed by name throughout the reports, making what Washington intended as an accounting of labor at his farms into a valuable, if limited, record of the lives of the people at Mount Vernon.

The farm managers, at Washington's direction, headed pages of their reports with Dr (for debtor) and Cr (for creditor). Washington borrowed these terms from the double-entry bookkeeping that he used in his financial records (see Series 5 in the George Washington Papers). His farm reports, however, were different from his ledger books, since they dealt with time—hours of work—rather than money, and the only parties to these transactions were Washington and the people who worked for him, including those whose labor he owned. This appears to have been a unique practice, and it is not entirely certain what Washington meant by it—except that in this period he was trying to systematize his farming operations.

This set of farm reports dates from the period when Washington, like other Virginia planters, had moved away from tobacco as a staple crop toward a more diverse agriculture. These reports show cultivation and processing of grain, including wheat, corn, rye, and oats; fibers for textiles, including flax and hemp; fishing, distilling, and cultivation of potatoes and turnips. Workers hauled wood and rails, grubbed, plowed, and cleared fields; dug ditches, made fences, made and fixed farm implements, cared for livestock, made bricks, and repaired buildings. A few traveled into nearby Alexandria on Washington's errands.

Washington's farm reports were created by his managers for him for what they believed were pragmatic reasons—today the reports have more to tell us than they could ever have imagined.

To be part of the crowdsourcing project, go to https://crowd.loc.gov/ and help bring these eighteenth-century papers into the twenty-first century.

Julie Miller, Historian, Early America, Manuscript Division Joseph Mitchell, Intern, Archives, History and Heritage Advanced Internship Program, Fall, 2021

Read More About it:

"Farm Reports—Editorial Note," *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008. Online at Founders Online: https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-03-02-0347

"Washington and the New Agriculture," in: *Diaries of George Washington*, Volume 1, xxv – xxxvii. https://www.loc.gov/collections/george-washington-papers/articles-and-essays/introduction-to-the-diaries-of-george-washington/washington-and-the-new-agriculture/

Bruce Ragsdale. *Washington at the Plow: The Founding Farmer and the Question of Slavery*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2021.

Caitlin Rosenthal. Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018.

Brenda E. Stevenson. *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Thompson, Mary V. "The only unavoidable subject of regret": George Washington, Slavery, and the Enslaved Community at Mount Vernon. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019.